

# Like a Rolling Stone

**John Davis highlights a Bridport man's unique diary of his time following The Rolling Stones**

*Photographs by Neil Ebdon and Bjornulf Vik-iorr*



**J**ohn Nicholls, a resident of Bridport, became a fan of The Rolling Stones purely by accident. When he was thirteen, a friend gave him a box of Beatles records. It also contained a few singles by a group called The Rolling Stones. Hearing songs like *Paint It Black*, *Satisfaction* and *Jumpin Jack Flash* for the first time meant there was no going back.

John finally got to see the Stones at Wembley Stadium in the summer of 1982. The impact was palpable. It was an adrenaline rush like no other, something he would experience countless times over the next five decades.

Obtaining show tickets proved problematic at first until a chance posting on a fans' forum in Germany proved momentous and opened up easier access. He was soon to follow the group all over Europe, to the United States and South America.

With the passing of Charlie Watts in 2021 and John's own personal battles, time may no longer be on his side. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards are in their eighties so where and when this rock and roll juggernaut will come to its final resting place is anyone's guess.



*Dateline: September 29th, 2003: Keith's photograph*

I hear that Keith Richards is staying at The Landmark Hotel in London.

The previous day, while in Bill Wyman's Sticky Fingers restaurant, I meet a German fan selling photographs he has taken of The Stones. I like the one of Keith and promptly make a purchase.

Down at The Landmark Hotel, I join some friends but they leave to make the journey to Wembley Arena. I recognise Keith's minder exiting the front of the hotel. Just behind him is Keith himself. I'm stood next to an SUV with darkened windows and they're walking in my direction. Next thing I know, Keith is stood right in front of me. Armed with a pen, I ask if he will sign my photo which he does "With love Keith Richards 03". I shake his hand and wish him all the best for the show. I can't believe my luck. I'd bought the photograph and got to meet Keith Richards the very next day. Definitely one to tick off the bucket list.

*Dateline: South America 2016: The Holy Grail*

The Rolling Stones tour dates in South America are to be in February and March. Good friend Martin Elliott comes up with the idea of taking in shows in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

At one point I have five different currencies stuffed in my pockets. In Buenos Aires we stay in a hotel opposite the cemetery in which Eva Peron is buried. It really is the Holy Grail to see a live band in Argentina and the reaction of the crowd when The Stones appear on stage is a memory that will stay with me forever.

Then it's on to Montevideo and the Estadio Centenario. It was built for the World Cup in 1930 and to be honest doesn't look like it's been touched since. It's vast and people at the back are a long way from the stage.

A hotel on Copacabana Beach awaits in Rio de Janeiro and we take in the sights, Sugar Loaf Mountain and the statue of Christ the Redeemer. Truly breathtaking but in stark contrast to the shanty towns (favelas). The Maracana is an iconic venue packed with almost eighty thousand people.

*Dateline: United States 2005: Radio jingle*

After a show in Columbus, Ohio, we meet Lyn Davis who invites us to a radio station where she works as

a disc jockey. Next thing we know Lyn puts the mics in front of us and soon we are going out over the airwaves.

After crossing the USA/Canada border to take a show in Toronto we face a long drive back.

The following day Lyn Davis is on the phone. She wants me to recite several lines to be used as a radio jingle. "Hi, I'm John from England and you're listening to Lyn Davis on K103 in the Mahoning Valley. She rocks". I think they liked my English accent. When we're back in England, we hear there is no escaping my voice as the jingle is being played constantly.

*Dateline: Isle of Wight 2007: Hello Jade*

The Stones are the headline act. At the site I go to the ticket office and hear a voice from behind the counter say, "We've got you a hospitality pass with Virgin Radio from mid-day. I hope that's OK?" Yes, it b\*\*\*\*\* well is OK, I think.

In hospitality, I briefly chat to Jade Jagger and inform her that her dad has cost me a fortune over the years. She laughs.

Later I stand on the balcony outside where a few of us are subjected to verbal abuse and hand gestures from some of the crowd below. Hell, I'm thinking, I've been a fan since I was thirteen and they presume I'm only here for the free champagne on offer.

*Dateline: New York 2006: Removal men*

My friend, Martin, has nowhere to stay so we decide to put him up in our hotel although there is nowhere in the room to sleep. As we walk through the hotel lobby, Martin grabs one end of a chaise lounge and me the other. Casually we walk down the corridor to our room. I can only assume the onlookers thought we worked for the hotel and were just moving furniture around. Martin slept very well and the following morning we return the chaise lounge to its rightful place.

After the gig we head for a bar called Walters. We see two guys on the floor punching each other. A woman then screams out, "He's got a gun." In the distance I can see a police car. I manage to grab his attention and tell them what is happening. He speeds over and arrests the guy. A very eventful night in New York City. A real roller-coaster of a ride and one I'm not entirely sure I wish to repeat.

# *This Month* in the not so distant past

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Looking back at historical moments that happened in July,  
**John Davis** highlights **The Underground Railroad**.

**T**he Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses used by enslaved African Americans to escape to freedom in the northern part of the United States and Canada.

As a name it is a misnomer since it was neither underground or a railroad but rather a metaphor for the covert and often highly dangerous system of helping people flee slavery.

More of The Underground Railroad later but first the crucial role played in the concept by two Harriets, Beecher Stowe and Tubman. The first was an abolitionist and the writer of the seminal anti-slavery novel that became known as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the second a 'conductor' on the railroad itself who assisted 'passengers' as they fled north.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, who died at the age of eighty-five in July 1896, came from the state of Connecticut in the United States. She was the sixth of eleven children in the family, her father being a hardline and outspoken Calvinist preacher.

She worked as a teacher for some time before moving to Cincinnati where her husband encouraged to pen articles for a women's magazine. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was partly inspired by the loss of her son from cholera and the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which legally forced those living in the north of the USA to return runaway slaves.

The novel, first published in serial form in *The National Era* magazine, was an instant success and, once published in book form, sold over 300,000 copies in the first year. Its strong anti-slavery stance had an enormous impact on public opinion. Beecher Stowe's intention was to acquaint those living in the north about the conditions faced by slaves in the south and to attempt to make slave-owners there more empathetic. It was immediately banned in the southern states and, reputedly, also in Imperial Russia, where parallels were made between slavery and serfdom.

Critics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* produced rival versions to counteract the themes expressed in the book but later Beecher Stowe wrote her own *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* which included primary source historical documents to back up her depiction of life for slaves

in the southern states. Harriet spent much of the later part of her life speaking nationally and internationally, giving donations and raising money to help boost the anti-slavery movement. When she met Abraham Lincoln, he is supposed to have told her, "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started that great war (the American Civil War)." The quote though is unsubstantiated and is probably an example of journalistic licence gone mad.

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In more recent times certain high school libraries removed the book from their shelves largely because of its 'inappropriate language' and 'stereotypical stock characters'. Since, though, common sense has prevailed and the novel is now viewed as a literary work which should be considered in the context of the time in which it was written and for an intended purpose and audience.

There is a Harriet Beecher Stowe Center (sic) in Hartford, Connecticut which is open to the public and each year an HBS Literary Award is made to a writer espousing the civil rights cause. The winner this year is Percival Everett for his novel *James*, a re-imagining of the Mark Twain tale *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* but told from the perspective of Huckleberry's friend James, who is an escaped slave.

If Harriett Beecher Stowe led the literary charge towards the abolition of slavery, it was her namesake Harriet Tubman who was to become one of the hands-on protagonists who propelled the movement forward.





*Uncle Tom's Cabin is an anti-slavery novel by American author Harriet Beecher Stowe*

Tubman's maternal grandmother is believed to have arrived in the USA on a slave ship from Africa and Tubman was brought up as a slave in Maryland. As a youngster she was hit in the head when a slaveowner threw a heavy metal object at someone close to her and all her life suffered from dizziness, pain and some aspects of narcolepsy, especially experiencing dreams and visions.

In 1849 Tubman escaped to Philadelphia but she missed the support and social interaction of her family and friends despite the harsh conditions in which they had all been forced to live. In close cooperation with others, she helped to set up The Underground Railroad, a system of waterways, secret trails and safe-houses along which slaves passed until they reached safety in the northern states or in some cases Canada. Once her family and friends had been liberated, Tubman focused on other slaves who wanted emancipation. Escaping slaves were called 'passengers' while those leading them were termed as 'conductors'. Tubman used the codename 'Moses' and, discounting exaggerated claims by some biographers later, is known to have made thirteen trips to the south and 'conducted' some eighty people to safety.

During the Civil War (1861-1865) Tubman worked for the Union Army first as a cook and nurse but later as a scout and spy. She was heavily involved in planning and executing a number of military raids carried out by the Union Army specifically

aimed at releasing large numbers of slaves like that at Combahee Ferry. She is believed to be the only woman closely connected with such raids and was posthumously awarded the honorary rank of Brigadier-General after her death.

At the end of the war, she moved to live in property she owned in Auburn, New York where she looked after her parents and other family members. She married for a second time and adopted a daughter. Harriet became increasingly associated with the cause of women's suffrage in later life and was thought to be ninety when she died. No accurate figure could be given as the date of her birth had never been officially recorded.

*Footnote:* In addition to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, further information can be obtained through the book *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead and from the film *Harriet* currently streaming on Netflix.

*Semi-retired and living in Lyme Regis, John Davis started working life as a newspaper journalist before moving on to teach in schools, colleges and as a private tutor. He is a history graduate with Bachelors and Masters degrees from Bristol University with a particular interest in the History of Education and Twentieth Century European History.*



# Bjork at Sladers Yard

## The Heroes of Sainte-Mere-Eglise by J.D.Keene.



IF THERE is one period of history in which enthusiasm never seems to have dimmed it is the Second World War. Whether it's the build-up in Europe during the 1930s, the conflict itself or the aftermath worldwide, the

novels keep coming by the bookshop load.

According to the author this book had been in the planning for a number of years and he was finally inspired to get it written when he visited Sainte-Mere-Eglise, an actual town in Normandy on the Cotentin Peninsula.

The place is actually only a few kilometres from the legendary Utah Beach used during the D-Day landings and was one of the first towns to be liberated by American soldiers.

Rewind, and following the invasion of France, the Nazis, including a detachment of the Waffen-SS, arrive with a plan to occupy this quiet French town. Some of the locals, the French Resistance and later Allied forces have other plans though.

The narrative is certainly engaging and fast paced as we switch from one piece of action to another. Locations with date-lines are included so readers know exactly how things are progressing chronologically.

The diverse range of characters introduced are appealing and easy to identify with and, although some of the writing may be a little uneven in places, there is an excellent balance between actual historical events and fictional creations.

Personally, I found the section dealing with the refugees escape from France via the Pyrenees into neutral Spain over-long and could not wait to get back into France as D-Day loomed. But that's a minor gripe in what otherwise is a very readable example of the genre.

*Published by Vinci Books.*

*Reviewed by John Davis*



DORSET-based Icelandic ceramic artist Björk Haraldsdóttir shows her work at Sladers Yard in West Bay from July 19th. Björk makes strong sculptural forms which she drapes with monochromatic patterns. At the core of this work is a conversation between three-dimensional form and two-dimensional pattern. Initially working as an architect for twenty years she made ceramics as an antidote for the many creative constraints placed on an architect, seeing it as 'small architecture with no brief and no client'. For more information about the Sladers Yard show visit [www.sladersyard.co.uk](http://www.sladersyard.co.uk)

## Behind 'The Art of the Photograph'



*Tandem © Alison Webber*

A NEW series of articles about photographers working in the wider local community began in the April edition of *Marshwood+*, the online issue of *The Marshwood Vale Magazine*. In this series we learn about local photographers, as well as those drawn to the people and places that make up the area in and around the Jurassic Coast.

In August we will meet Alison Webber. Speaking about her photograph above, entitled *Tandem*, Alison says that it forms part of her *Shadows* series and the image is an important example of the way in which she approaches photography. 'I like to capture what I see in the moment' says Alison, 'never knowing what might appear. It could be a beautiful reflection or a graphic pattern but in this case my eye was drawn to a bold shadow which appeared fleetingly as the sun momentarily came out from behind a cloud.'

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